

NOTES RE METROLINX PLANS – GEORGETOWN/RAIL LINK

Who was there?

For Metrolinx:

Brian Pelletier, Executive Lead on Air Rail Link and Georgetown South GO Expansion, Robin Connelly, Community Relations Officer

For Community:

Len Gurunlian
Eli Malinsky
Linor David
Gary Miedema
Tara Neal McNally
Larissa Kostoff
Jason Bomers

OVERVIEW: The Tracks, Train Stations and Construction

- Metrolinx is constructing three new tracks in the northern and four in southern part of the railway. One or two tracks are continuous throughout the corridor from Brampton to Union Station.
- An EA done in 2005 thought GO would need two more lines. The most recent analysis says four lines. The 2005 EA will be available on-line shortly.
- The four new lanes would be built for GO, regardless of the Rail Link. Rail link trains will simply slide in-between GO Trains using those tracks.
- Existing tracks will be used, although possibly shifted in some places to accommodate geography/grade etc. The type of tracks may be upgraded in some areas
- The bridges over Brock, Lansdowne and others will need to be widened to accommodate the extra tracks.
- None of the tracks are dedicated; they will be used by GO Trains, CN trains, CP Trains, Via Trains and by the Air Rail link. Traffic is controlled by a signaling station at Union Station.
- All tracks, a part from the 3 km rail spur from the GO lines to Pearson, will be built at public expense, and owned by the Province. The total public cost of the project, including tracks, and bridges, and station improvements, is expected to be \$875 million dollars.
- SNC Lavalin, the private operator of the Rail Link, will build the Pearson spur, 3.3 Km) and be responsible for any station improvements along the line that are made necessary for the Air Rail Link – including a terminal at Pearson. There is no available projected estimates of the cost of the work being done by SNC Lavalin.
- SNC Lavalin will be purchasing 5 trains for the Air Rail Link.

Estimated Train Numbers and Passenger Travel

- This is “mostly a GO Expansion”. Go Trains are currently at capacity and unable to accommodate the predicted 64 million annual trips that are considered possible by 203-. GO numbers are a result of a “comprehensive” transportation demand model using population growth, land use, etc. (model is provided by consultants - IBI)
- Metrolinx’ first year “conservative estimate” of ridership on the Air Rail link is 1.35 million passengers per year. By 2025, they predict this number to be up to over 3 million. Airlink numbers come from SNC Lavalin, which did interviews at Union and Pearson and conducted surveys to arrive at the data, which was then married with economic projections. Copies of the surveys aren’t available as they are part of the business case for SNC Lavalin.
- SNC Lavalin proposes five trains circulating continuously, with 15 mins between trains, running 19-20 hours per day (not in the middle of the night, 12:30-5:30)
- There are currently about 50 trains a day running through the Weston corridor. When the expansion is complete in 2014, Metrolinx estimates 220-240 trains (CN, CP, Via, GO and the Airlink) per day. 140 of the new trains are Air Rail Link and 30 are GO.
- There will eventually be 300+ trains a day through Weston. The numbers will be significantly higher the further south you go. South of Dundas, for example, trains from a planned Bolton line, from Barrie, and from Milton all merge into the same corridor.
- Construction will take about 4-5 years, and will likely start in 2010

RFP Process, Agreements with SNC Lavalin

- In 2003-4 an RFP was issued by the Transport Canada (federal) for the operator of the Air Rail Link. There were 3-4 bidders and SNC Lavalin was successful. The proposals are not publicly available and will not be available until the contract is signed (would disrupt negotiations)
- The contract with SNC is still under negotiation by Infrastructure Ontario. A Memorandum of Understanding has been signed, but not a formal Agreement. This material is not yet publicly available.
- While SNC Lavalin will own the Air Rail Link trains and operate on public tracks, it is not clear whether they will pay for the usage of those tracks.
- The Environmental Assessment must be approved in order to finalize the contract

The Fast-tracked Environmental Assessment Process

- The public consultation that has taken place prior to April 1 has not been legally required – this was an effort to get feedback from stakeholders
- There is a legal obligation for consultation during the EA process
- The EA, commencing April 1, is a new shortened 6 month process set up for transit projects to speed up their approval, given that they have a benefit to the environment.

Previous EA's had to assess all possible options for the project, and could take years. The new, shorter EA's analyze a very narrowly defined project, and do not consider other alternative solutions.

- This will be only the second EA to follow the new 6th month process. The first was the recent study for the Yonge Street subway extension.
- The shortened EA's are only for transit projects that meet certain legal criteria. It is the transit authority's decision (Metrolinx) to decide which process to use. Part of the reason for the streamlined process is to tap into the environmental benefits of a transit project
- The EA process works like this:
 1. Notice of commencement to everyone within 30 m of the tracks plus newspaper and community centre postings (Metrolinx indicates they will go 40 m from tracks). Estimate of population 30-40 meters away from tracks: 8,000-10,000
 2. Immediately after the Notice of Commencement, a 120 day period of public consultation begins, including a round of open houses plus a website to gather comments. Data will be available during this phase.
 3. This leads to a report "The Environmental Project Report" which is publicly posted.
 4. The posting is followed by a 30 day period for comments to the report.
 5. The report is then submitted to the Minister of the Environment, who is given 35 days to respond. The Minister has three broad options: a) approve the project as is b) approve with conditions (at Minister's discretion, but these have to be related to a matter of "provincial significance") c) decline (in which case they need to do more work and the conduct a new EA)
- Minister will act only on issues that Metrolinx could have addressed but chose not to
- The EA is assessing the impact of the proposal on air quality, noise, vibration, construction impact, traffic diversions, impact on heritage building, human health
- The EA process is considering diesel only, not electrification, It is also not considering further stops (eg. at Dufferin and Queen.)
- The EA is being conducted by consultants McCormick Rankin- "best people you can get in the field"
- If there are adverse impacts (compared against the baseline of doing nothing) they will look at ways to mitigate them:
 1. Pollution: Mitigation measures could include not running the trains on smog days, not running them when most people are home, installing special scrubbing technology to limit pollution, using alternative fuels.
 2. Noise and Vibration: installing rubber beneath the tracks, weld tracks so no joints, install the best switches

Diesel

- The EA will be assessing the impact of diesel trains by modeling the future air quality, concentrations of particulate matter, impact on schools, senior's homes, etc.
- The first step is to analyze; the second step is to develop mitigation strategies if the analysis warrants those.

- Given that the trains will take cars off the road, Metrolinx assumes a net environmental benefit. When questioned about the fact that half-empty Air Rail Link cars might actually not result in less pollution than people in cars, response suggested that they'd never heard that argument.
- There are five "Tiers" of diesel trains (0-4), with 0 as most polluting and 4 as least polluting. GO trains will meet minimum Tier 2 standards; the Rail Link will meet or exceed tier 3
- Metrolinx decided on diesel for the Air Rail Link.

Electrification

- The EA process is considering diesel only, not electrification, because to make electrification part of the EA Metrolinx would have to engage in another 1-2 years of studies.
- Metrolinx argues that it will take an enormous amount of work to electrify the rail lines because they would need to accommodate the overhead wires that provide electric power to the trains. These necessitate taller bridges, and room on either side of the trains for poles. Bringing in power to corridor will also be very expensive.
- Metrolinx can't say what the cost of electrification would be because they have not completed the necessary studies. There is no such study currently planned; there is no money available to fund this study
- Metrolinx wants to get started as quickly as possible rather than waiting; this allows them to make progress on the immediate needs while planning for the future
- In construction they are trying to preclude any wasted infrastructure by anticipating some of the changes that may be necessary for eventual electrification (e.g., structural widening)
- Their plan suggests two stages: "start with clean diesel and then plan for electrification"
- "At the moment, there isn't a train that can run in both diesel and electricity and pull the GO Trains. No hybrid cars are strong enough to pull the load required by GO."
- Trains available in Europe do not serve our needs. They need to meet higher crash test ratings here because commuter trains in Europe run on their own lines. In Ontario, they run on lines with freight trains, and the risk of accidents is much higher.
- Air Rail link sized trains – electrical multiple units – are available in Europe, but they don't meet N.A. traffic standards for crashes – except for refurbished bud cars. SNC Lavalin could special order hybrid trains for the Rail Link that could meet NA crash standards, but this would be very expensive.
- The intention to electrify in 15 years is that only, and is subject to future funding; this possibility is in competition with a lot of other very worthy transit projects
- The funding for the studies of electrification is a political decision – need to get the money by lobbying councillors, MPPs, Mps. The money currently available can only cover the project if it uses diesel trains.

Increased number of access points along Rail Link.

- The Metrolinx plan will maintain existing stops, and add a new one at Eglinton
- The Rail Link will stop at Weston and at Bloor, potentially also at Woodbine
- GO is a regional transportation solution, not a local one. Therefore extra stops (eg. Queen/Dufferin) are not being considered. According to Metrolinx, such stops would extend the length of the trip for commuters from outside of the area, and would therefore not be possible. Furthermore, our area “is already served by TTC”.
- Air Rail Link is not considering more stops because these will add to the time necessary to travel from Pearson to Union. Air Rail Link trains making multiple stops would also not seamlessly mesh with GO trains making fewer stops.

Community Connections

- Metrolinx expressed some flexibility and interest in helping to facilitate connections among communities bifurcated by the tracks. A pedestrian bridge over the tracks to Sauren Park, in particular, was mentioned.

RailPath

- Metrolinx expressed interest and support for maintaining the anticipated railpath, at least from the Junction to Queen. The path may then have to be diverted on to roads because of the narrowness of the rail corridor.
- Metrolinx did not address the fact that cyclists will be breathing toxic fumes from all these diesel trains. They seem to not have considered this.

Community Consultation:

1. Metrolinx was pleased with their efforts in February to reach out to the community. They were not legally required to do so.
2. In the end, roughly 700 people attended the openhouses, and Metrolinx received 653 individual comments. 200 people viewed plans on-line, and 35 on-line messages were received. 75 e-mails were received by Metrolinx.

OUR MESSAGES

1. Metrolinx needs to consider the physical health of the people who live along the tracks
2. Metrolinx must work to promote access to this new infrastructure for the people who live along the tracks
3. Metrolinx must work to connect communities along the tracks instead of splitting them apart

Issue/opportunity: Creating more stops

We want them to consider stops up and down the rail path to serve the many communities that live there. This way the people most negatively affected by pollution, noise and vibration also have a chance to benefit by using it. Metrolinx doesn't want to slow the trains down in this way, so we proposed commuter and express trains. Metrolinx argued in return that commuter and express lanes could not run on the same tracks, and we don't have room for more tracks in the corridor.

But they have tracks planned for dozens of years from now – for capacity they aren't yet even close to. How do they weigh the future benefit of potentially reaching full capacity in 2030 via these tracks against the benefit to tens of thousands of people up and down these tracks starting in 2013? How do they compare the benefit to all of us in terms of participating in this great new infrastructure against the fact that 15 years from now people will have to wait an extra 2 minutes for their train?

Issue/opportunity: Debunk the mythical promise of electrification:

- How can they appropriately plan for eventual electrification if they haven't yet completed the study?
- How do they justify an investment of this magnitude without planning appropriately for electrification
- How can there be even lip service to electrification if there is no known technology to handle GO Trains or freight trains?